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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH VICE FOREIGN MINISTER ON PRIME  
MINISTER'S "STRATEGIC" VISIT TO U.S.

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1.(SBU) Summary: In a May 19 meeting with the Ambassador, Vice Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh emphasized that the upcoming visit to the United States by Prime Minister Dung had "strategic importance" and took a serious effort by the GVN to arrange. Minh and the Ambassador discussed possible deliverables for the visit in the areas of education, climate change, human rights, and consular district issues. They also exchanged views on Vietnam's role on the UN Security Council, cyclone assistance to Burma and concerns about China's role in the South China Sea. End summary.

2. (SBU) Minh said the Prime Minister's visit had "strategic importance" and had required major reshuffling of the Vietnamese leaderships' schedules in order for the visit to the United States to occur this year. The Prime Minister had recently convened an interministerial meeting to discuss the wide range of areas that could be addressed in the context of a visit. Minh said in his own meetings with NSC and State in April he understood that there was difficulty in finding a date when Blair House was available, but that in any case the visit itself was not in question.

3. (SBU) On deliverables, Minh said the Ministry of Education and Training was sending a team to Texas to look at possibly signing MOUs with universities there. There has been an "evolution" in Vietnamese thinking, and the country now wants schools with U.S. curricula and teachers. The Ambassador noted that, while MOUs could be valuable, time was short and a joint task force could pull together a number of initiatives following up on the visit.

4. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that our bilateral Human Rights Dialogue is set for May 29 and that it offered an opportunity for progress ahead of the Prime Minister's visit. He pointed out that one simple change the GVN could make for press freedom would be to allow foreign news organizations to open offices in Ho Chi Minh City. Currently they can only have offices in Hanoi and must travel to the south to report. Minh said this could be considered.

5. (SBU) Minh said climate change was another area of high GVN interest, and the Ambassador said we are preparing a package of deliverables in this area. Among other deliverables, GVN participation in the Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative (GPOI) would be welcome. Minh said the GVN was open to sending personnel for training for noncombat operations. On the AO/dioxin issue, a team from the Embassy is doing an assessment in Danang this week and EPA is coming out to Vietnam to consider next steps. Minh said any concrete steps on this before the Prime Minister's visit would be welcome. On adoptions, the Ambassador pushed for a GVN commitment to join the Hague Convention and said the USG could offer technical assistance.

6. (SBU) Discussing Vietnam's tensions with China in the South China Sea, Minh said the situation could be solved peacefully and Vietnam

is ready to negotiate. Asked about an ASEAN role, Minh responded that the ASEAN countries have different interests but the various claimants try to work together. The Ambassador said the U.S. supports dialogue and remains concerned about Chinese harassment of companies working in the area. Minh noted he understood from his April consultations in Washington that this was an issue POTUS would like to discuss with the Prime Minister.

¶7. (SBU) On cyclone assistance to Burma, Minh said Vietnam was offering to send a medical team but was facing transportation issues. The Ambassador noted that the USG has airlift capability and renewed our offer to transport Vietnamese supplies and personnel to Burma. Minh was noncommittal, but noted that the GVN is in touch with the Burmese regime and that it is changing and becoming more open.

¶8. (SBU) On the UN Security Council, the Ambassador thanked Minh for Vietnam's support on Iran sanctions but noted that we had differences over other issues such as a resolution on Somali piracy. Minh said Vietnam feels it is important that its voice is heard. The GVN's concern had been that the resolution could be expanded to include other areas including the South China sea. That clause was changed, Minh said, but the resolution would set a precedent for acting against a nonstate actor and piracy is not as serious a threat to international security as terrorism. To the Ambassador's observation that some in the U.S. say Vietnam is simply following Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) positions, Minh responded that Vietnam is after all a NAM member.

¶9. (SBU) Minh said the GVN is focused on solving the remaining issues regarding the New Embassy Compound (NEC) in the context of Prime Minister's visit. Minh said the U.S. side misunderstood that the 99-year lease the GVN offered was not renewable. He clarified that it is in fact renewable but that renewal is not automatic - the USG just requests renewal six months before the lease runs out. The

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Ambassador responded that 99 years plus "maybe" 99 more does not equal freehold. The Ambassador then asked about the possibility of the 70 year plus 70 arrangement offered for private investment. Minh asserted that such an arrangement is not for diplomats and that there is no precedent - we are already far down the road on this and changing tack now would complicate things in a negative way. The Ambassador said if nothing can be worked out we would be back to the issue of reciprocity.

¶10. (SBU) Minh said the GVN is considering sending a team to Houston to look at property for a new consulate. The Ambassador said that would not be a problem as long as the GVN signed no agreements - a Houston consulate for the GVN could be established at the same time the Ho Chi Minh City consular district issue is resolved. Minh agreed that this was possible. Minh noted that the GVN is still pressing for permission to issue visas in New York, and the Ambassador said he would look into the issue.

MICHALAK